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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BEIRUT 000695

SIPDIS

NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/YERGER/GAVITO

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [KPAL](#) [SY](#) [IS](#) [LE](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANON: NEED FOR REALISTIC POST-PILOT PHASE
BORDER SECURITY PLANNING

REF: A. WARD/IRWIN E-MAIL

[1](#)B. BEIRUT 00688

[1](#)C. BEIRUT 00625

[1](#)D. BEIRUT 00128

[1](#)E. BEIRUT 00435

Classified By: CDA Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) The strategic implications of Lebanese border security came into sharp focus recently. On May 5, the Charge visited the Northern Border Pilot Project (NBPP) Command Center in Tripoli and the Aarida border crossing station. On May 6, she attended a lunch organized by the UN to discuss the upcoming visit of the Lebanon Independent Border Assessment Team (LIBAT). On May 7, Hizballah proved what a devastating effect smuggled weapons could have on Lebanon when they used their firepower to close the access road to the Beirut International Airport and instigated confrontations in Beirut that soon spread to the Chouf and to the Tripoli areas.

[1](#)2. (C) Prior to this outbreak of violence, conversations have been ongoing in Beirut for the last few months about the future of border security, both in the northern region covered by the Northern Border Pilot Project (NBPP) and a possible extension to the eastern border with Syria. The EU member states, particularly Germany, Britain and Denmark, have preferred to deliberate internally to reach a common position paper, which was formally shared with U.S. and Canadian donor representatives on May 7 (Ref A).

[1](#)3. (C) It has become evident that there is a need to decrease the influx of illegal arms into Lebanon. However, given the strain that recent events have placed on the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), international donors should work intelligently with the GOL to assess the Lebanese inter-agency willingness and ability to take on such a challenging new responsibility in the near future (Ref B). Also, it has also become evident that any attempts to enhance security on the eastern border would require an enormous investment of funds, manpower, and expertise from both donors and the GOL. End Summary.

NBPP Progress Finally Evident in the North

[1](#)4. (C) On May 5, the Charge, Special Assistant, ODC Chief and A/RSO traveled to the headquarters of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) Northern Brigade. The Charge was greeted by General Farid Khoury, the recently named head of the Common Border Force (CBF), and representatives from the other

interagency organizations in the CBF: the Internal Security Forces, General Security and the Lebanese Customs Department.

Khoury assured the Charge that interagency cooperation had come a long way in recent months and he believes that the CBF "esprit de corps" will continue to build. (Note: This observation is seconded by British and Danish contractors who have been on the ground in Tripoli running training programs for the CBF. End Note.) However, he is concerned that the CBF will be stretched a bit thin. There are 625 total officers to cover an area with one million inhabitants, 116 villages, and 800 square kilometers of territory and coastline, which some consider to be the easiest way to bring weapons into the country (Ref C). (Note: DAO and ODC disagree with this assessment on coastline vulnerabilities. The LAF navy patrols the shore, the UNIFIL Maritime Task Force has eight vessels that patrol Lebanese territorial waters, and the German coastal radar upgrade recently became operational. End Note.)

¶5. (C) When asked what the CBF's main achievements are to date, Khoury mentioned:

-- the establishment of both permanent and randomly located checkpoints. "We are showing the Lebanese flag at the border points and this sends a very important message."

-- mobile "wheeled" patrols which use donor-provided sports utility vehicles, motorcycles and all-terrain vehicles.

-- completion of all technical and "command and control" training modules provided by the donors.

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-- near completion of the infrastructure improvements needed to bring LAF outposts up to code to support donor-provided computers and secure communications equipment.

-- a steady increase in the number of arrests for weapons smuggling and illegal immigration.

¶6. (C) While grateful for the three month extension of the NBPP (Ref D), Khoury said that it is time for the "pilot phase" of the program to end on June 30. He and his colleagues are anxious to move into the "consolidation phase," which they hope will bring together their training and newly-acquired technical capabilities. While Khoury seems anxious for the CBF to "take ownership" of this new operation, he said the CBF may still require support from donors. (Note: The British and Danish governments have agreed to extend the contracts of their trainers who have been working in Tripoli. They hope to serve as "mentors" as the CBF begins full operations. The Germans, whose absence in Tripoli has been noted by many, have bristled at this "mentor" model. End Note.) Khoury said additional equipment may also be needed, but the CBF will not know exactly what gaps exist until they are out in the field. Looking ahead, Khoury said that the CBF will have to look at recruiting additional officers to staff the CBF. He told us that the CBF is also committed to maintaining the expensive and sophisticated equipment provided by donor nations.

¶7. (C) USG-donated secure communications equipment was operational during the visit. The LAF contributed approximately USD 150,000 to purchase final accessories needed for installation and the final work will be completed on May 12. Colonel Hamid Iskander, head of the LAF's NBPP Project Implementation Unit, said that the LAF needed back-up batteries for the hand-held radios provided by the USG so that field patrols could swap out and rotate recharged batteries without interrupting field operations.

Local Reactions to the NBPP

¶8. (C) ISF General Ashraf Rifi, head of the GOL Interagency

Steering Committee for border issues, announced earlier this year that the CBF would not focus on the smuggling of food or fuel, but rather on weapons and illegal immigrants. This move was well-received in the lower income areas surrounding the border that depend on the trade of agriculture and diesel fuel from Syria. (Note: This announcement riled German police officers who run the NBPP office in Beirut. The police officers said that their mandate was to stop all smuggling and they did not seem to grasp the socio-economic implications of a completely sealed off border. End Note.)

¶9. (C) Khoury told us that, in general, the local community has cautiously accepted the CBF. The armed conflict which raged for months in the Nahr al-Barid refugee camp left a strong mark, as many of the LAF officers who were killed by Fatah al-Islam insurgents with smuggled weapons were originally from the Tripoli area. Khoury noted that there were 635 CBF officers to cover an area of operations with over one million inhabitants. Local support will be key to the long-term success of the program.

¶10. (C) Khoury said that there was a need for the CBF to begin to pro-actively engage and partner with the local communities on development programs. "The smugglers, in general, are poor, uneducated locals who cannot find jobs. We have to help them if we want them to help us." He was pleased that UNDP had offered to fund a socio-economic impact assessment to inform international partners about donor possibilities. Embassy Beirut has previously recommended that USG funds be allocated to support this initiative, which could help strengthen the LAF's position in the north and show that the Siniora government is capable of delivering services in the underserved north (Ref E).

UNSCOL Prepares for LIBAT visit

¶11. (C) On May 6, Action UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon and UNDP Country Director, Marta Ruedas, organized a lunch with the Charge, the German Charge, the British Ambassador

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and the EU Mission Head. Two important border security donors, Canada and Denmark, were not invited. UNSCOL staff told us that Ruedas wanted to have a more detailed conversation with the "big countries" about the upcoming LIBAT mission.

¶12. (C) The UNDP outlined plans to fund a study to examine the economic impact of border security measures on the surrounding communities. UNDP will use the findings to prepare their own assistance strategy and welcomed cooperation and coordination from other donors. Ruedas also offered to provide each donor with an individual briefing from the LIBAT team on their findings. (Note: UNSCOL staff informed us on May 14 that the LIBAT mission was still scheduled to begin in late May. However, the security situation on the ground will be reassessed shortly to determine if the mission dates are still feasible. End Note)

EU Deliberations Result in Useful Paper, But Will Germans Accept?

¶13. (C) The EU, for weeks, had been conducting internal deliberations to come up with a unified response on the way forward. British and Danish representatives pushed back hard against an extension and duplication to the eastern border of the poorly-run German pilot program. Both countries flew in high-level military and policy analysts to prepare an analysis of the NBPP results and to provide recommendations for their governments. The final paper that was adopted by the EU members state representatives offers useful suggestions for reforms and operational planning.

¶14. (C) On May 7, the EU formally shared these documents with

the U.S. and Canada. As we began to examine the content, we heard reports from British and Danish contacts that the Germans were backtracking on the paper. The Danes were told that the Germans were referring to it as a "draft" EU paper and that the way forward would only be decided by Prime Minister Siniora and the German Chancellor herself. UK diplomats in Berlin echoed the sentiment, telling their local embassy that German MFA counterparts were dismissing the documents.

Comment

¶15. (C) The events since May 7 have certainly shown that Hizballah's willingness and ability to use weapons to achieve its political objectives. These weapons have greatly destabilized both the LAF and the Siniora government itself.

¶16. (C) There is clearly an international will to prevent the flow of illegal arms into Lebanon, but the execution of this complex task raises important questions:

-- Who will lead this effort? What is the command structure and operational plan, both on the Lebanese side and in terms of the international donor efforts? We have strong reservations about allowing the Germans to continue applying the same formula to the east.

-- Is border security possible in the east? The Syrian government refuses to cooperate in a bilateral effort. The threats posed by armed local gangs and Muslim extremist groups in the two Palestinian camps along the border greatly increase the security risks along the eastern border.

-- Are the LAF and the GOL ready and able to start such a confrontation with Hizballah along the border? The event of early May have demonstrated that Hizballah militants are much stronger than previously assessed. On May 14, LAF Commander informed Acting CentCom Commander Lt. General Dempsey that "he has enough manpower to implement the current missions approved by Lebanon's political leaders" (Ref B). He has implied in the past to Embassy staff that his current troop levels would be insufficient for new labor-intensive missions, such as enhanced security along the mountainous and dangerous eastern border.

-- Will the donor community be able to fund such a program? There are estimates that this initiative could cost almost USD 200 million. In local donors meetings, it has become

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clear that the EU member states and Canada expect the USG to fund a significant portion of this program.

¶17. (C) We understand that the German and EU representatives had scheduled a meeting with PM Siniora to discuss border issues. This meeting has been postponed due to the current crisis. It will be useful to gauge the GOL's willingness to engage on this issue once the dust settles from the current violent clashes with Hizballah. End Comment.

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